

ENGLISH 163

American Films of the 1930s

Semester I, 1975-76

Professor Silverman

Assignment #1; due 29 September

Write on one question, one aspect of one question, or a combination of elements from various questions. At all times deal specifically with visual detail from the films cited.

1. Trace the patterns of light and darkness which follow Dietrich in each film. How does the cinematographer and lighting cameraman take advantage (exploit) her bloneness? Do the clothes Dietrich wears express elements of her character (that is, of the character she plays in the particular film) and of her being (that is, as "Marlene")?
2. What preconceived images of Dietrich did you bring to the films, and how did the films controvert or support those images? BE SPECIFIC.
3. Comment on the pull between sophistication and innocence in Dietrich in each film. Does her role as femme fatale ever seriously compromise her essential goodness? Is it "essential goodness," or is it something closer to pristine amorality, whatever that may be? Discuss Dietrich's moral qualities, in short.
4. In each film, Dietrich comes up against quintessentially "American" leading men. What issues from these encounters?
5. Discuss the decor of each film, noting the differences (Last Chance Saloon vs. Hotel in San Sebastian, for example) in terms of objects, and the way in which they are defined and discriminated. How does Marlene take her place as an object in the midst of these differing settings?

GOOD, CONCENTRATED
WORK. YOUR STRENGTH —
ATTENTION TO VISUAL
DETAIL —
COMES THROUGH
CLEARLY.

jeremy butler

english 163

october 6, 1975

Assignment 1a, QUICK MILLIONS

QUICK MILLIONS is a distant film, not in terms of the forty odd years that separate it from the modern day viewer, but rather in the style in which director Rowland Brown and photographer Joseph August have chosen to present the narrative. We today are well versed in the ambience of the 1920's and gangsterism through movies, TV and our grandparents, among other sources, but we cannot help but be blocked from immersion in the story by the halting pace and the practically defensive effect of the visual compositions; barring us from enjoyment of the text as if it were a case of bootleg rum to be hoarded.

It is almost possible to pardon the awkward rhythm of QUICK MILLIONS as a product of the techniques of filmmaking of the early sound era; if it was not for the fact that William Wellman was able to overcome these obstacles quite handily in a predecessor of QUICK MILLIONS, THE PUBLIC ENEMY. (Perhaps Wellman's capability to compose a smooth, continuous story within the strictures of sound film equipment's capabilities resulted from his experience in silent film (notably, WINGS); Brown, for one reason or another, failed to distinguish himself in silent film.) While THE PUBLIC ENEMY glides along with a fluidity to match Cagney's unerring dancer's grace, QUICK MILLIONS moves with a gait which may only be compared to that of Dr. Frankenstein's monster. Brown fades in, brings the sound up, presents the scene and then unceremoniously takes the sound down and fades out. In a sense, QUICK MILLIONS resembles the crudest of D.W. Griffith's early features -- only Griffith's iris has been replaced by the simple fade. However, if we may deride QUICK MILLIONS for seeming 15 years older than it ought, we must also add that Jean-

I THINK
THOUGH.

THAT
WELLMAN'S
CARE IS
RAATHER
UNEVEN.
AND PUBLIC
ENEMY IS

softly & perhaps unusually appropriate to its intentions?

quite
cheap

in
spot

who?

-2-

Michael Silverman has suggested that the often blatant discontinuity of the image is ~~consonant~~ with the QM is structurally discontinuous of lifestyle-uncertainty of survival, piecemeal respectability (the Tracy-Richmond ~~plot~~ breakfast is has a lovely ~~represented~~ self-consciousness both as a dramatic episode and a figure of visual speech)

Luc Godard would concern himself with the same issues decades later. Consider the montage in VIVRE SA VIE that fades in and out on Anna Karina as she passes the day with various customers -- the music starting and stopping at will.

The auteur within us may be tempted to claim that Godard doesn't just replicate earlier film techniques, but rather utilizes them to criticize the medium and that Brown must have composed QUICK MILLIONS in the fashion that he did because his artistic limitations left him little choice. To which our formalist faction must surely reply. QUICK MILLIONS enacts a criticism of this celluloid we film critics revere with the same verve that much of Godard's work does. For example, the seeming arbitrariness of the fade as used in QUICK MILLIONS draws attention to that all too commonplace technique.

If Brown had carried it one step further and cut directly between two sequences in which a passage of time has elapsed (as modern filmmakers have begun to do), he might be hailed in today's film journals as the Godard (Rivette, Chabrol, Marker, et.al.) of 1931. As it is, we cannot even locate his name in any of our film dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Even more interesting than the transition between sequences in QUICK MILLIONS (and a further ramification of the distancing effect of the film) is Brown and cinematographer August's treatment of the three major murders in the film: I refer to Jimmy's murder of the radio crusader, the consequent gas station murder of Jimmy and, finally, the murder of Bugs. Each of these killings is filmed from one set shot that Brown/August obviously took pains to select (see the pre-Alberti drawings on my final page). To examine each of these scenes fully let us first articulate each one in turn (mindful of the fact that the film has been viewed but once). The crusader's final moments are filmed from an extreme low angle shot under neath a table at which we cannot even determine his activity. Jimmy's form (his head is blocked) enters

in the background of the image, shots ring out and the crusader topples to the floor -- his face obscured by a tale leg. Jimmy approaches the still body, deposits a few more bullets in it and then exits. His turn is to come not long after. Bugs hears of Jimmy's ^{indiscreet} ~~indecrete~~ adventure and tells him via the phone to go to a gas station (which has previously been ^sestablished as Bugs' private execution site) to pick up money and a car~~g~~ to make good his escape from the law. With a trust that may only exist between two gangster buddies, Jimmy goes to the station. This sequence is shot entirely through the windows of the station: the establishing shots of the attendant are fil~~m~~ed through the windows, Jimmy makes known his presence by rapping at a window to get the attention of the attendant/executioner and the attendant finally eliminates Jimmy by shooting his pistol out a paneless window frame. The third murder is accomplished in one of the most mobile settings, a car, but with an extremely static camera set-up. Driving to Miss Stone's high society wedding, Bugs, Nails and one other are framed by the camera as they ride along -- through the back window we recognize passing traffic (presented via back projection). Bugs complains of Nails' manners ("Get your elbow out of my ribs.") and then the thug we never really got to know pulls down the curtain on Bugs. The last we see of Bugs is his (too high?) hat thrown on the red carpet of the Stone ~~w~~edding. We then return to the car (which has now become a herse) and the driver and his companion discuss the merits of marriages and funerals (shot without the usage of back projection).

Each of these killings explores a different aspect of the use of framing. (Certainly there is no one use for a frame, even within the relatively limited field of movies -- the films of John Ford ^{have} ~~has assuredly~~ taught us that.)

The murder of the radio commentator employs the crudest frame of the three: the table and its legs are used to excise the majority of the commentator's

perhaps to suggest a final parting of the ways between gangland aspiration to respectability + its confidence in more illusion of success

body when he is first shot. In this instance, QUICK MILLIONS does not down-
play the sensationalism of a cold blooded killing; the victim's squirming
legs are enough to evoke our sympathy ^{exactly} for him. Further, the body is mostly
visible when Jimmy ensures his marksmanship with a few more slugs. As this
is the most violent killing, it is also the most malformed frame and the act
of violence "closest" to the audience (i.e., the one which effects us the
most). Even though we barely recognize "Loudspeaker", as one of the gang refers
to him, his is the death presented with the most passion.

The next shooting takes place in a more fixedly structured mise-en-scene.
Though a frame may be used to stabilize an image, to make it resemble a still
painting, the ubiquitous window frames in the gas station fragment the image
more than settle or stabilize it. The lines running throughout the picture
slice it into tiny bits that rebel against ^{formation of} ~~forming~~ a cohesive whole. They are,
however, a progression from the rather anomalous, ^{pi} wierd frame of the table
in the previous execution. Concurrent with this formal progression is an
advance in delicacy. Though Jimmy screams before he meets his end, he is
completely off-screen and the distasteful sight of blood is kept from our
eyes. We glimpse not a writhing part of Jimmy's anatomy, but rather the gas
station attendant portrayed in a grid which will soon transform into a snare
^{as} ~~are~~ he is arrested while phoning a false report into the police.

With the third killing we reach the height of sophistication and cold
distanciation. In this instance the frame is congruent with the frame of the
entire image. In this transformation from visible, external frames to an
internal and, in effect, invisible one does not vitiate the power of the frame
to the slightest degree. In fact, it increases its efficacy.

To start with, the characters move the least in this sequence, ~~out of~~
~~the three murders~~. Outside of the traffic viewed through the back window

does the act of his legs
recall Tracy's extraordinary
limbness in the
trucking sequence the
(where he jumps out of the
cab onto the
cop)?

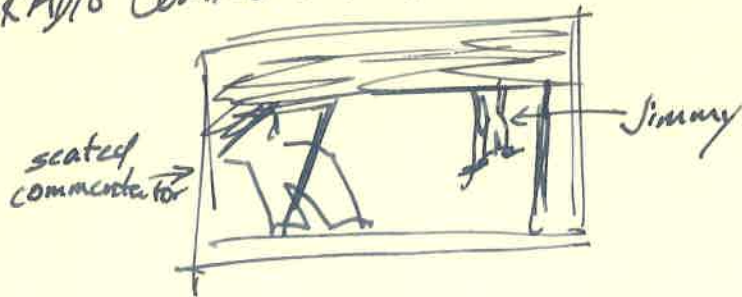
2
2
13
81
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233
2808

or an occasional turn of the head, everything remains perfectly static. This quiescence is echoed^d not only by the stillness of the camera, but by the composition of the image. The rectangular shape of the rear^r window (a point of interest because of the motion contained within it) accentuates the presence and the shape of the frame surrounding the entire image. This emphasis is further heightened by the utilization of back projection: an image within an image, a movie within a movie. To still further evoke our sensibility of the frame QUICK MILLIONS suggests what must be the equivalent of the frame in the theater, the proscenium arch, by drawing a curtain on the scene. (How delicate that our playwright should end the play before harm comes to the major proponent.) Bugs' hat tossed on the carpet may strike a false and obvious note, but the succeeding shot is a master touch. The absence of back projection and the very real presence of actual traffic in the background contrast with the "artificiality" of the murder shot. In retrospect we are made even more conscious of the framed qualities of the earlier shot (i.e., its distance, stability, sophistication and delicacy).

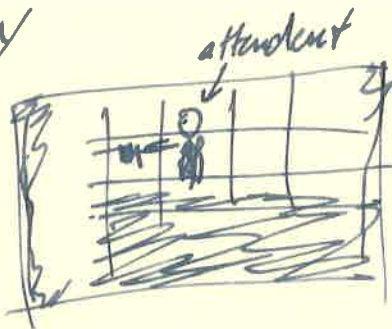
If we compare the endings of QUICK MILLIONS and THE PUBLIC ENEMY we find that they are complete antitheses. In the latter film we have been drawn into the drama of the film and have come to like Cagney regardless of the dubious merit of his actions. To see him land on his nose dressed as a mummy ^{comes} as quite a shock. On the other hand, ^{grief over} Bugs' death is kept from us; we feel little or no sympathy for him though we might easily have felt as much affection for Bugs as for Cagney. It is the ultimate victory of the distanciation in QUICK MILLIONS that we feel nothing when Bugs comes to the end that crouches in wait for all gangsters.

The film is unusual
conservative - in its
as you say, delicate -
in its visualization of
gangland lifestyle + violence.
It certainly exploits Tramp's presence
to give credence to the idea of the
hoodlum as pathologically incapable →

RADIO COMMENTATOR



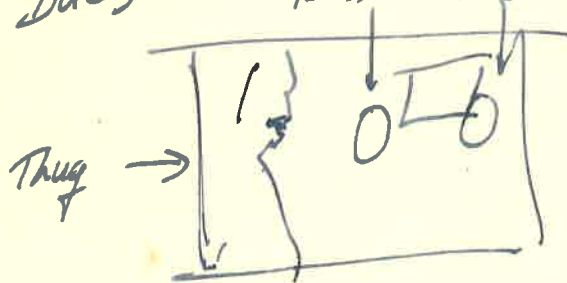
Jimmy



BUGS

Nails

Bugs in the car



Write on one question, one aspect of one question, or a combination of elements from various questions. At all times deal specifically with visual detail from the films cited.

1. Both films deal with the movement through society of a central character (played by Tracy), either toward power and ultimate failure or toward promotion and respectability. Trace the movement, and indicate the sorts of things accumulated along the way (a "gal," a dress suit, money, etc.) Try to isolate key scenes for particular discussion.
2. What is a "beezock" (alternative spelling, "beezawk") and how does it differ from a "twist"? Examine the varieties of "beezocks" in ME AND MY GAL, and "twists" in QUICK MILLIONS. How is vernacular language (slang, Americanisms) used in either/both film(s) to underscore a fundamentally democratic vision? Try to take intonation into account.
3. Examine "home-life and family" in the films. Why does ME AND MY GAL so often focus on homelessness, and the problem of the floater? What about Sarge and the dog ("There, fella, now you've got a home!"). In both films the sanctity of the home seems to be violated, and innocent persons threatened by a criminal presence (the bank robbery in QUICK MILLIONS, Duke's taking sanctuary in ME AND MY GAL). Try to assess the worth of the family, and its relation to the individual (Tracy's characters, mostly).
4. Examine the lighting in QUICK MILLIONS. How does the low-key, shadowy finish to many of the sequences lend a tone and density not really present in any other element of the film? Does the success of the camerawork (lighting especially) affect our estimate of the film's worth? If so, why?
5. Describe Tracy's physical presence in each film, and its connection with a kind of moral presence (something he would continue to develop in his later years as an actor). Does this moral presence make itself felt in QUICK MILLIONS? How does he prevent the character of "Bugs" Raymond from seeming unredeemable; at the same time, what limitations does Tracy's presence give to the figure of the gangster (compare Cagney or Robinson, or Paul Muni in SCARFACE)? How does Tracy (with the help of Joan Bennett and Walsh) prevent ME AND MY GAL from sliding into mawkishness?

Scenes to consider, *perspectively*:

Dinner hold-up-

Panning + high contrast shot

Bugs' murder

"Loudspeaker's" murder

Jimmy's murder

Bugs telling Daisy off

Nails admiring Daisy

Stoue vs. Bugs

use of perspective
in murders

(mindful of the fact that the
film has been viewed but
once)

Assignment 2a

1. Describe the code of feminine romantic yearning, suffering, guilt and redemption operative in ANNA KARENINA. How is this code re-enforced by the style of the film? Does Garbo seem trapped within this code, or does she transcend it (perhaps through the sheer magnitude of her appeal as a star, i.e., as a vehicle for our collective yearning)?
2. How does DINNER AT EIGHT manage to alternate between social comedy of manners and romantic melodrama without splitting apart? Describe the changes in visual texture as the film modulates from one mood to another. Does it seem important that everyone wants to keep his/her social veneer intact (or wants to attain a certain position of respectability)? Does the "successful dinner" have social implications extending outside the film?
3. Which of the two films strikes you as the more polished stylistically, the more highly glossed? Can you describe the differences in terms of lighting, camera angle, blocking of characters, etc. Why does stylistic transparency seem a more "natural" style for film-making?

NOTE: Do not try to describe Garbo; let's leave that to Raymond Dugnat and Roland Barthes, aspiring imaginations whose work you might wish to consult.

ENGLISH 163
American Films of the 1930's
Semester I, 1975-76
Mr. Silverman

Assignment 2b

1. On the basis of the two films from each studio seen so far (and any other films you may care to bring in from your own viewing experience) can you characterize the differences between "MGM-style" and "Warner's-style" in terms of lighting, utilization of decor, acting style, choices of theme? For goodness' sake, be specific.
2. Andrew Bergman (We're in the Money, p. 100) characterizes Tom Holmes's final speech as "what theology recognized as the 'leap of faith,' the point at which system ended and heart began." Do you find this speech to be affirmative (take into account the setting and the speaker)? Take into account, also, the fact that this isn't the final sequence in the film--how ambiguous (pessimistic, optimistic, combination of both?) does the last sequence seem?
3. Discuss the theme of law, order and legality in G-MEN. What sorts of things go into making a top G-man, and what sorts of values does he seem to represent?
4. Comment on the various signs (newspapers, teletype messages, telegrams, etc.) which run through G-Men. Is this part of the scientific (quote, un-quote) apparatus of the film? How do they function as shots within the style of the film as a whole; i.e., how do they reside within the film (as a shorthand way of getting a "message" or "information" across to the viewer? as a way of moving through space?).
4. Comment on Keighley's use of close-ups to begin and end sequences in G-MEN. Close-ups of what? For what purpose? Does this sort of visual short-hand ever resemble a controlling style?
5. Does Wellman's compression of time in HEROES FOR SALE (1917?-1932) strike you as well managed cinematically? What visual means does the film employ in order to make the passage of 15 years convincing? Or does it seem convincing?

I like you "Street" / "Drawing Room" model

for the respective Warner
MGM universes. Like you ^{NOT}
last paper, this one is richly ^{LATE}
provocative. I'd been thinking of Heroes

Jeremy Butler

October 20, 1975

Assignment 2b in terms of its confining pessimism

English 163

Articulation of MGM and Warners' style on the basis of DINNER AT EIGHT ^{promised}
^{land.)}

and ANNA KARENINA and HEROES FOR SALE and G-MEN, respectively, is reminiscent ^{your}
of the tale of the six blind men describing an elephant. Who knows what ^{comparison}
particular appendage of the body of Warners and MGM's 1933-1935 product we've ^{of Barrymore}
grasped in studying these four films. Trepidations cast aside I would hazard ^{in DART}
that the basic difference between the studios is the difference between ^{the death of}
two views of life which I have tenuously categorized as the "Street" (Warners) ^{Capra's friend}
and the "Drawing room" (MGM). It's not so much that Warners attempted actual ^{in G-Men}
documentaries or neo-realist melodramas (at least as they were to surface in ^{captures}
post-war Italy), but that they fabricated a Street which forsook certain ^{the contract in Cukor's}
realities of lower class life (e.g., tedium) ^{in Keighley's} in order to deliver a tough, ^{he approaches}
^{certainly opposes the neorealist impulse}

lucid story. However one may wish to describe MGM, "tough" is not one of

the terms which springs to mind. Their characters, with notable exceptions

(Beery and Harlow in DINNER AT EIGHT), belong in the Drawing room, while the ^{in Heroes the mob drags Barthelme out down the}
Warners' characters congregate ^{on the steps of their tenement brownstone, steps +}
^{into the Street as a kind of biblical descent on}

The narratives of all four of the films under consideration revolve around ^{place}
societal problems. Each film has at least one character who is outside of ^{he's really}
the realm of proper society for one reason or another: Anna Karenina and ^{most himself -}
Vronsky in ANNA KARENINA, Kitty and Dan Packard in DINNER AT EIGHT, Tom ^{most}
Holmes in HEROES FOR SALE and "Brick" Davis in G-MEN. Each of these characters ^{Christlike -}
^{from when released}
disturbs the strata of society to which they are closest, and the resolution ^{from all his prior}
of this disturbance illustrates some of the basic differences between MGM and ^{cages}
and Warners. In the MGM pictures the characters are eventually contained and ^(prison)
^{John}
^{famously}
^{responsibility}
^{to the}
^{America}
^{as the}
^{promised}
^{land}
^{analogue} ^{abounds, though I think in Heroes too}
controlled while the Warners' social climbers attain some degree of success, ^{to the}
though they may forfeit much of it eventually. Specifically, Vronsky and

Anna dare to break the conventions of upper class Moscow society and are ostracized by that society until Vronsky weakens and leaves Anna for the army (which is presented as little more than an officers' drinking club). Though Anna may be better equipped to deal with high society's pressures (she boldly sneaks into her son's bedroom against the sternest command of her husband, she suggests she and Vronsky go to the opera), she cannot withstand Vronsky's defection and subsequently commits suicide. Kitty and Dan Packard disrupt New York high society through Dan's plans to bankrupt Oliver Jordan -- precipitating Jordan's heart attack. Dan's scheme is finally brought under control by Kitty, a woman with high society aspirations and alliances, and once again the would be disrupter of society is checked. Though in both instances the ruling society appears rather petty and trivial (at times cruel), each film clearly illustrates that that society is resilient to attacks. Persons who challenge its authority are quashed.

the film's glances at "men in groups" are fascinating - lots of passage + intimacy etc.

If I had a choice I'd take Cuckoo's Nest - it's the imagination of the Selznicks' sexist status quo any day!

Conversely, G-MEN and HEROES FOR SALE present an exceedingly mobile and transient society. Brick incarnates social mobility in G-MEN: his movement from gutter-rat to college boy to honest, but poor, lawyer to g-man is clearly outlined. Society doesn't hold him back as it did four years earlier in THE PUBLIC ENEMY or as it persecuted Paul Muni in I AM A FUGITIVE FROM A CHAIN GANG. Brick's chief enemy is the gang, not the society that Dan Packard or Vronsky and Anna combat. Clearly Tom Holmes, in HEROES FOR SALE, is abused by society, but he is little worse off than "aristocrat" (banker) Roger. As Tom puts it during their second scene in the rain together (the first being the World War I trenches): "You started high and I started low and we end up in the rain together." Granted, society in the form of townsmen looking for lawbreaking hums puts Tom out in the rain once again near the conclusion of the movie, but the final image of this somewhat

confused film is Tom's son, a living, breathing monument to the changes in society Tom fostered. The son's determination to emulate his father and the plaque eulogizing his contributions to society intimate at least covert acknowledgement of Tom's affect on society. *do does the "Way Ends" headline earlier - but surely in asking us to emulate the unflagging resignation of a Christ Wellman demonstrate minimal confidence in the system*

Both "acting style" and "decor" accurately reflect the difference between the Street and the Drawing room, more obviously perhaps in the setting (decor) than in the acting. There can be little doubt that both DINNER AT EIGHT and ANNA KARENINA are set in upper class environs, In the latter it's the splendor of 19th century ballrooms and in the former it's 20th century New York City apartments, but there is little difference between the two outside of the era in which they are situated. Additionally, they are both theatrical pieces: DINNER AT EIGHT largely because it in fact stems from a play *also seems to concern psychic rather than physical realities - fantasie in dialogue* and ANNA KARENINA because of the theatricality inherent in a costume drama. On the other hand, HEROES FOR SALE and (especially) G-MEN shun theatricality for snappy, glistening improvisation. The stilted dialogue and awkward movement in HEROES FOR SALE tend to contradict this generalization, but even in 1933 it was considered a "logy yarn" by "Variety" magazine, quoted by Ted Sennet in Warner Brothers Presents. HEROES FOR SALE's sluggish tempo seems more a fault in William Wellman's usually capable direction than any design of the brothers Warner. Or perhaps Warners' newly discovered social consciousness hampered Wellman's (sometimes known as "Wild Bill" Wellman) style. Wellman's typical product is best described by critic Manny Farber:

Wellman's lean, elliptical talents for creating brassy cheapsters and making gloved references to death, patriotism, masturbation, suggest that he uses private runways to the truth, while more famous directors take a slow, embalming surface route. (Negative Space, p. 17)

Films of George Cukor, Clarence Brown and other MGM directors readily qualify

great frustration - I'd like to read more of Farber

as superficial. The ideal setting for this superficiality is, to my mind, the Drawing room.

Furthermore, the lighting techniques that some have said create a shell of light around Greta Garbo in point of fact merely "embalm" her. Ghostly pale and white, she emanates a ^{o perfect phrase!} death pallor rather than an incandescent glow (CAMILLE fits her only too well). Cukor is careful to keep her lit in this unhealthy fashion until she finally chooses suicide and the train station turns into a collection of dark, forbidding shadows of its daylight self, similar to the suicide scene in DINNER AT EIGHT in which Larry Renault carefully dims the lights in one last attempt to recreate the stage. (One wonders if we would accept the same actions from a movie actor character.) Darkness at MGM is clearly another excuse for theatricality. In the brightly lit life of the Drawing room, darkness occurs at only the most theatrical and melodramatic moments. In the Street, darkness consumes all that exist within its perimeter. HEROES FOR SALE loses control of that darkness and is obscure and poorly defined; a muddy film in which even the daylight sequences (few though they are, comparatively) are dim. Conversely, the image in G-MEN is, if not bright, at least clearly delineated. In G-MEN's night time sequences (e.g., the shootout at the lodge) the action is readily evident and we don't feel, as we do in HEROES FOR SALE, ^{that} as if tar has been spread on the lens as vaseline occasionally is. G-MEN's lighting, then, is concerned with an immediate and unimpeded communication of Cagney's flippant character and the slap-in-the-face urgency of his actions -- a demeanor totally unbefitting a staid drawing room, just as Renault's theatrical last exit would appear mawkish and false in Brick's world on the street. (An interesting comparison could be made between Renault's death and the unassuming "funeral march" at the train station for Brick's murdered, g-man friend.)

a marvelous insight - Barnum's suicide + the friends' objectified death seem archetypally theatrical / cinematic

ah ha - would he turn his back so we'd have to look over his shoulder?

It does seem concerned with confinement though - battleground, not by the shadow periphery of the screen - Cagney's image

In sum, the "lighting, utilization of decor, acting style, and choices of theme" of MGM remind one most of a well-stuffed armchair -- supportive and comfortable, but not too provocative or disturbing. Warner Brothers, in its portrayal of the Street outside the window (proscenium arch?) of MGM's Drawing room suggests a precarious and disturbing view of society. We sense the raw imbalance of the street in HEROES FOR SALE and G-MEN while ordered, precious theatricality dominates ANNA KARENINA and DINNER AT EIGHT -- though we must immediately qualify that statement with the knowledge that the MGM films contain certain facets of the Street while Warners possesses the at least its fair share of/artificial theatricality present in the Drawing room.

*in Heroes especially which seems to
port confinement / theatre as
"dead-endness" - fate as stasis -
while MGM simply glories in the
status quo*

ENGLISH 163

Semester I, 1975-76

American Films of the 1930's

Mr. Silverman

Assignment 3a

1. Each film articulates a private code between two characters or a group of characters, which lies outside the normal codes of behavior held by the society "at large." Can you outline the codes, the consequences of adhering to them, and the sorts of opposition encountered.
2. While Borzage's film moves towards romantic transcendence, Lubitsch's vision seems more grounded in irony and behavioral comedy. Does this division result in a different sort of visual style? What sorts of things does Borzage tend to film, as opposed to Lubitsch? Discuss such things as the use of lighting, the sorts of objects/filmed, the use of close-ups, etc.
3. Much of Lubitsch depends on verbal wit. Why should language, used in a highly stylized way, become such an important feature of the world depicted in TROUBLE IN PARADISE? Why does inarticulacy, and hesitancy become the mode of expression in Borzage's film (note that the wittiest character, Rinaldi, is rejected and almost villainous).

21

Your paper is spontaneous,
sure, nimbly critical in the
best sense of the word. I
must disagree with your premise -
both films strike me, both in terms of
convention + technique, as strong
sentimental (remarks below).

L A T E

Jeremy Butler

English 163

November 3, 1975

Assignment 3b, A Modern Day View of A FAREWELL TO ARMS and TROUBLE IN PARADISE

A
fascinating
story, in
any case

To begin with the obvious, TROUBLE IN PARADISE and A FAREWELL TO ARMS
(mostly)
are two very different looking films: the former is light and art deco and
the latter is dark and reeks of war and Ernest Hemingway. Strangely enough,
both films present us with a subdued sentimentality -- which one might well
expect from the sophisticated TROUBLE IN PARADISE, but which comes as some
surprise in FAREWELL TO ARMS, a movie with a plot which could easily be
branded sentimental. Just as Catherine Barkley rejects Frederic Henry's
sentimental love talk in the first kissing sequence in the garden ("You
don't have to talk nonsense," she admonishes), the film consistently undercuts
its sentimental aspects: the heroism of its hero, the beauty of its
heroine and the emotional appeal of their actions. The two films appear
extremely different visually and contextually, but neither of them encourages
sentimentality. *all have to fight you on this*

ALWAYS TAKEN
DIRECTLY
FROM THE
NOVEL
BY THE
WAY.

In turning to particulars, let us first consider the face of Helen
Hayes (Catherine Barkley) and its presentation in FAREWELL TO ARMS. We first
encounter it in the supply room of the hospital as she eavesdrops with
what appears to be the entire corps of nurses at the hospital. At this
point she is not markedly differentiated from the group of nurses, though she
is the only one to comfort the freshly dismissed nurse. We first grasp she
is more to the story than an anonymous uniform when she stumbles into the
same cellar into which Frederic Henry (Gary Cooper) has previously stumbled.
While Frederic studies her foot -- a continuation of a previous exercise in
a cafe -- we the viewer cannot study her face because director Frank Borzage
has cloaked it in darkness. It is not until Frederic is formally introduced

perhaps
affect us
subliminally
do we
return to
them +
reintegrate
them
retrospectively?

CAN YOU SUGGEST WHAT ALL THIS
MISTILLOKE IS WORKING TOWARDS?

-2-

to Catherine by his drinking companion Rinaldi (Adolphe Menjou) that we get
a clear view of the features which are to allure Frederic. To this point
the mystery of Catherine's identity justifies her concealment, but once she
and Frederic retire to the privacy of the garden it becomes evident that
we are not going to be afforded a much clearer view of her throughout the
course of the movie. With the resources of a romantic "Italian moon" at
his disposal, Borzage chooses to mottle Catherine's face in the most

unbecoming manner. Instead of romanticizing her with a swath of well-placed
light emphasizing her eyes, for example, she seems more the victim of an

advanced case of leprosy -- half her face is eaten away with darkness.

Borzage conceals Catherine's countenance on numerous crucial occasions.

Consider the sequence in which she writes her first letter from Switzerland

to Frederic. As she reads the letter aloud we view her face only briefly

and then tour the room (the visuals neatly contradicting all she has

written). Once we return to her face she blocks our view with Frederic's

picture -- effectively cancelling the sentiment that could have been

milking from the scene. Another earlier sequence in which the romance or sentiment

is undermined is Frederic's reunion with Catherine in the hospital in Milan.

We almost become accustomed to the disturbing subjective shot by which we

understand Frederic has entered the hospital on a stretcher when Catherine's face

looms hideously large in the frame as she greets him with a kiss -- far from

a romantic image. (For some odd reason I can't pin down, it reminds more of

UNCHIEN ANDALOU.) FAREWELL TO ARMS tantalizes us with scenes suffused with

sentimental potential and then nullifies that potential with odd lighting or

strange placement of props or unexpected camera angles.

Frederic's sentimental appeal is undercut not so much by his crude halting

manner (which has a certain boyish appeal) or his presentation on screen, but

well, but
it might appear
less
unbecoming
than this, even
to someone
older than
Cooper
only does
view of
Cooper's
picture -
simply
intimacy
+ the
failed he
+ the letters, distance?
How does
Borzage
visual style
confer
the promise of
allegorical
sentimental

How is the statue used sentimentally?

the
thought
has been
given a
face -
How does Borzage
emphasize
on women's feet + legs
relate to
Cooper's 1st
impersonal
violent 'kiss'
How does the
2nd kiss
anticipate the
triumph of intimacy?

though awkward, doesn't
the shot of Hays' eye
recapitulate the idea of the
transcendent
Power of
sight?

some
the
razor
blade

by his distance from the "glories" of war. "I was blown up eating cheese," he states unassumingly. In all his time spent as an ambulance driver on the front lines, the scene Borzage chooses to emphasize and use as the cause of Frederic's injury revolves around a spaghetti dinner. Few settings or activities seem less heroic.

True - but Borzage deliberately excludes the war from the Realm of sentimentality - there are no heroes in the film - only the carnality

Borzage's design, if I may be so presumptuous, is to illustrate what the priest in the Milan Hospital preaches to Frederic and Catherine, by which I mean his sermon regarding the horrors of war. Frederic has not really seen the war, the priest declares. To the priest's mind, Frederic has not realized the searing inhumanity and ugliness of war. As I see it, Frederic's short-sightedness informs Borzage's tight rein on the romance and sentimentality

DON'T YOU THINK - GIVEN THE PLAGUE OF ROMANTICISM AT WORK IN SEVERAL MEN'S + OTHER BORZAGE WORKS - THAT THIS IMPULSES TO RESTRAIN IS AN ODD ONE?

that is chafing at the bit in this narrative (Hemingway or no Hemingway). By keeping the characters distant from us he turns their actions into caricature; they aren't allowed deeply heartfelt emotions that don't appear ridiculous or distant on screen. Though Catherine feels she knows the war because her former lover was demolished in it and Frederic tastes the war through his ambulance driving, both of them operate under false assumptions. However, the situation is far from static and each of them undergoes a transformation that is perceptively visualized by Borzage.

Is this a necessary myopia - Hays obviously comes to "fill the world" when for Coopers

The major revelation occurs to Frederic during the montage sequence after he's deserted the ambulance corps. In that sequence he aids various wounded persons as he might ~~or~~ as ambulance attendant, but there is now a total change in his attitude. He is at once running away (some have suggested, "from a drama that has been thrust upon him") from his regiment and running toward his love. He has finally come to feel the deprivation and sorrow that is frighteningly commonplace in war. He is no longer a tangentially

WE DON'T SEE THIS THOUGH. DE US? IT'S RINALDI WHO MAY

why, necessarily? Borzage attributes the laconic indifference to Menzies + Cooper (+ in a sense "Fergie") to induced for a damaged sentiment war by the

BE THE EMBODIMENT OF WAR-TIME CLOUDEST.

war and is transformed by that engagement into a character much more appealing to our sentimental/romantic sensibilities. This transformation is confirmed by the second leg of his journey: the voyage across the lake. Once again he is constrained to undergo hardships in order to surmount the problems created by war; his suffering endears him to us.

Similarly Catherin's relocation to Switzerland incurs hardships that apply themselves in a much more direct manner than her loss of her lover previously. She must now endure not only the loss of Frederic, but also physical discomfort and finally the mental anguish inflicted by the return of her letters. She, too, is purified by "fire", so to speak and emerges a different woman who is consequently filmed differently by Borzage. He removes the mask of shadows behind which he had contained her face and bathes her in light to rival that lavished on Garbo.

The concluding deathbed sequence is the ultimate manifestation of their now holy affection. We are allowed to "approach" the characters; their sentiments begin to affect our sensibility and we are at last drawn into the (melo?) drama. In this short sequence Borzage creates a bond between Frederic and Catherine which earlier the visuals had conveyed as a hollow relationship; the two lovers were heretofore permitted to possess love without sacrifice. Thier untested love was kept removed from the viewer and presented to him or her only once Frederic and Catherine have undergone certain trials.

The sentimentality of this final scene builds until it actually transcends itself in the shot of Frederic lifting the dead form of Catherin from the bed, pulling the bedsheets (a brilliant white) up with him. It is as if the viewer becomes a part of that movement and is swept upward in a draft of sentimentality. We can at last immerse ourselves in those sentiments.

In contrast, TROUBLE IN PARADISE cloaks its high society characters

Yes - Hays give it everything she's got here ~~but~~ it seems to me she's been less "romantic" than Cooper to this point - more assertive as you suggest, not ~~more~~ glamorous entirely? ~~exactly~~

are the love shot + was montage also carefully structured to release our sympathy?

AN ODDLY SAVAGE P ON LUBITSCH. I
MUST ADMIRE YOUR COURAGE, WHILE
DISAGREEING WITH YOUR JUDGMENT.

glib phrases and a bright, even light with no luminescent progression,
constructing a defense against sentimentality and our affection for the members
of the cast. Lubitsch's facile, "transparent" style bars us from anything
more than mild amusement at the characters' actions. To create a clumsy
metaphor, there is no salt on the iced sidewalk that is TROUBLE IN PARADISE.
We slip and slide along on the dialogue conveyed through the long, evenly
lit takes of Lubitsch's camera, but there is nothing to support us as there
is in FAREWELL TO ARMS. There is nothing in his style which demands a
second consideration of the movie -- as there is in FAREWELL TO ARMS.

Don't we feel for Hopkins, agonizing
over Marshall's silence as she packs?
Lubitsch uses wit to disarm us intellectually,
seems to euphemize sex + romance out of
cynicism - but is it authentic cynicism?
Why does Marshall ball for Francis? Why do
Hopkins + Marshall "re-couple" in the taxi?
Lubitsch seems to be confirming a romantic
theme under the guise of attacking it -
remember Marshall's own best defense is
to attack!

ENGLISH 163
American Films of the 1930's
Michael Silverman
Semester I, 1975-76

Assignment 4a
6 November 1975; due 10 November

1. What relationships exist between "plot" and "numbers" in the films? Does the apparent split between strained comedy and rich production numbers provide GOLD DIGGERS with an interesting tension? If so, try to define it.
2. Trace the overt theatricalization of everyone and everything in GOLD DIGGERS. It would be best to concentrate on a single production number, and to be as visually specific as possible.
3. Approach this one with caution; describe the Astaire-Rogers chemistry as best you can. Concentrate on a single sequence, even a part of a single sequence. Can we ever separate the characters from the myth of "Astaire-and-Rogers," and if we can't, can they (do they use the myth for their own best ends)?
4. Describe the sorts of double identity, false appearances and splits which occur in SHALL WE DANCE. Do they ever get resolved satisfactorily?
5. Approach this one with even more caution than #3: describe Astaire's and Rogers's bodies as dancers, distinguishing their relative strengths. What do they give to each other, what steps can each perform best, how do they seem different when apart?

mx

ENGLISH 163

American Films of the 1930's

Semester I, 1975-76

Professor M. Silverman

Assignment 4b

1. Define and illustrate the mixture between cynicism and sentimentality in the two scripts by Ben Hecht. Does this split seem available in other films we've seen so far this semester?
2. How does Hawks structure his sound in HIS GIRL FRIDAY? Describe the use of telephones, gunshots, shrieks, and other essentially extra-verbal machinery. At what point does Hawks utilize music?
3. Does Russell's final breakdown and her subsequent tears seem a betrayal of her generally tough stance throughout HIS GIRL FRIDAY, or does it speak to a central paradox about her role and desires throughout the film? Is she crying over Ralph Bellamy?
4. Both films illustrate an essential lack of concern for human suffering. Which film most sustains this unconcern, and how is the balance redressed (if it is) on the side of compassion?
5. Why do the minor characters, with hardly any lines, attract our attention in HIS GIRL FRIDAY, while the minor characters in THE SCOUNDREL, with so much attention lavished upon them, fail to attract our attention?
6. Defend the script of THE SCOUNDREL.

11
Your approach to the film through the distant "storyteller" vs. the character who lives out her ambivalent impulses is a very compelling one - your points tend to be remarkably original + valid. English 163
You need a bit more documentation - please provide details!

Jeremy Butler

English 163

November 17, 1975

Assignment 4b, Cynicism/Sentimentality in THE SCOUNDREL and HIS GIRL FRIDAY

Early in HIS GIRL FRIDAY editor Walter Burns embodies the cynical storyteller when he brings Ralph Bellamy to tears over the picture he has created of Hildy Johnson in her old age, protected only by the life insurance policy that Burns is taking out. Burns fabricates the pitiable image of a senile Hildy, pretending tears and sentiment, in order to deceive Bellamy. Scriptwriter Ben Hecht often assumes Burns' position; it is this personification of cynicism that we first perceive when searching for the true character of Hecht and its manifestation in THE SCOUNDREL and HIS GIRL FRIDAY. I speak first to Hecht's directorial effort, THE SCOUNDREL, a film of unabashed sentimentality when considered as a whole. Hecht creates this narrative of a cynic who recants just as Burns creates the story mentioned above, but neither of them seems to incorporate themselves into the sentimental effect with which the story is imbued. They both remain the distant storyteller: spinning a yarn, but not being woven into its fabric themselves. Burns' renunciation of the sentimental is presented through his actions on screen, which is to say, through his condescending treatment of Bellamy in the scene above (though this is certainly not the only example one might have chosen) and we assume Hecht's cynicism because of his scripts for films such as

BY HIS WIT,
DIRECTED
TOWARD
SITUATION +
GENUINE,
AS OPPOSED
TO MALLARME'S,
WHICH IS
ALMOST
ENTIRELY DIRECTED
AGAINST PEOPLE
(INCLUDING
OF COURSE
HIMSELF).

HIS GIRL FRIDAY, UNDERWORLD, NOTHING SACRED, DESIGN FOR LIVING, TWENTIETH CENTURY.

an extremely valid point - I wonder whether Hecht felt compelled to fabricate the sentimentality of most of his scripts in order to defend himself against his cynicism toward himself

Things, unfortunately, are not quite as simple as they might first appear.

Neither is THE SCOUNDREL a full blooded tale of sentimentality for the "boobs

to gobble up" (as publish Anthony Mallarme of THE SCOUNDREL describes a book

he is to publish) or is HIS GIRL FRIDAY the unrelenting story of cynicism and

lack of compassion implied by its subject matter. The interplay between the forces of cynicism and sentimentality is best displayed in the activities of the central characters in each film, Mallarme, the scoundrel in THE SCOUNDREL, and, that vestige ^{from *the history of word aside, is that any way to talk about*} ~~the~~ Robinson Crusoe, Hildy Johnson in HIS GIRL FRIDAY. In ^{*Russell*} very different ways, each of them registers a conversion from cynicism to sentimentality of epiphanic proportions, Mallarme three quarters of the way through the film and Hildy before the film begins. The qualitative differences between these two characters are relatively minor (e.g., Mallarme's effeteness, Hildy's appealing pragmatism) and their major contrast turns out to be quantitative, the degree to which they are cynical or sentimental. A more precise definition of Hecht's proclivities is to be gleaned from their characterization and their placement in the milieu of the film. ^{*Russell's standing conversion is, of course, essential to her being sympathetic*}

Mallarme's conversion is both the more sudden and the more complete -- and necessitates a most powerful force to effect (i.e., God). He turns from a man who had shocked all by deriding an indigent author's suicide as "a foolish attempt to draw attention to his writing" to an angelic figure who admonishes his stable of cynical authors: "You're sick." In effect, Hecht is telling us that cynics shall be punished by the wrath of God. Cora's remark upon learning of the plane crash ("I've just found out there's a God.") highlights this vengeful image of God the ^{*well said*} sentimental and considerably weakens the impact of the film upon the modern day viewer. ^{*yes*} Hecht's extremism in THE SCOUNDREL practically destroys the film. Mallarme is at first too seriously cynical to appeal to the sensibility of the viewer, his conversion is too ^{*implicitly?*} cataclysmic and abrupt (even though tacitly forecast by the fortune teller) the scope of and his resulting sentimentality equals the dimensions of his previous cynicism. The audience joins the characters surrounding Mallarme in reactions of disbelief at Mallarme's newfound sensibilities. ^{*yes*} True, he does quote Cora's

though not
accurately - her correction
seems an indication of
her own narcissism

-3-

2
27
13
81
27
351

poems to her and appears at times to be genuinely in love with her, but he later dismisses her summarily. Hecht created a cynical monster who could be affected solely by an act of God. In the supreme sacrifice to sentimentality, Hecht actually uses God to cause a conversion that might have been better derived from Mallarme's conscious ^{need?} (for the sake of the story, that is).

the device ex-
machina is a
device we tend
to tolerate
only
when
parodied
any more

Hildy is a much more subtle and succesful character. Even though her actions are filtered through director Howard Hawks she seems much closer to what one would hope are Hecht's convictions -- though Hecht directed THE SCOUNDREL and theoretically exerted more control over its characters. Hildy is converted to sentimentality (a home in upstate New York to her, as opposed to a final resting place for Mallarme) as is Mallarme, but her decision to leave the path of cynicism occurs before the films begins and is

though Albany has been described as about
as much fun
as the grave.

neither as extreme as Mallarme's or as total. Hildy contains at once ample amounts of both cynicism and sentimentality, unlike the "either-or" quality of Mallarme's sentimentality. She vacillates between the home with Bellamy (himself an icon of simple-minded gullibility) and the press room filled with bylines brewed in cigar smoke and poker. She can sentimentally compose a sympathy-generating interview with Earl Williams and then help Burns in his scheme to capture an "exclusive" by holding Williams in a roll top desk. By employing these antipathies at once Hecht develops a more credible character and one which the spectator can readily accept. This acceptance is base, I believe, in the congruence of the spectator's own admixture of sentimentality and cynicism with Hildy's. We can see ourselves consumed by the desire to produce a winning newspaper article, one that may shake the foundations of a corrupt city government and we can understand how this passion might preclude certain of the more delicate human considerations. Hildy is a newspaperman close to our own heart. Similarly, her major excursion into

details
from a
sequence?

exactly

ALSO. OF COURSE. SHE DOES SHOW
SENTIMENTALITY IN THE PROLOGUE PHASES -
FOR MOLLY. EARL, EVEN FOR BLUES
-4- (WHO APPEARS ALL DESERVES
SOME) + UNWITTING (WHO RECOGNIZES
IT + NEEDS IT, BUT REFUSES NOT TO).

sentimentality (her interview with Williams) doesn't produce the absurd
mawkishness of Mallarme's final sequence with Cora and her fiance.

Hawks's subliminal
hand on the counter
lighter + the counter
seem to have
the sequence

One device that Hecht uses in both films to place his character's cynicism
into high relief is a group of barely distinguishable (from each other) cynics
who constantly comment on the action: the reporters in HIS GIRL FRIDAY and the
authors in THE SCOUNDREL. Though neither Hildy nor Mallarme actively interact
with the groups, each group provides a barometer of the cynicism/sentimentality
of Hildy or Mallarme. At the start of THE SCOUNDREL the group seems less
cynical (the older woman character states, "Cynicism is cheap") and more
attractive than Mallarme, but after his conversion it is Mallarme that appears
sentimental in comparison with the attitude of the group. In both cases,
as befits the extremism of THE SCOUNDREL, Mallarme is sharply differentiated
from the group. This sharp differentiation is dulled in HIS GIRL FRIDAY --
in which the cynicism/sentimentality is not as extreme. The other reporters
enjoy and respect Hildy and her cynicism/sentimentality practically melds
with the rest of the group. She may possess more compassion than the others
(as exemplified by her Williams interview), but it's a compassion that the
others respect. How does Hawks legitimize professionalism?

gs - a
great
example of
unintentional
merit
as opposed to
R + G's
interest
quite

"mother's tears" prose of Benzinger, which incurs a cynic's (Burns') derision.

Hildy is just like all the others, only better. Her separation from the group

is predicated upon factors outside of her cynicism (her intelligence, bravado,

pluck, etc.) while Mallarme sustains few connections with his authors and

is set apart from them solely by his cynicism or sentimentality.. He remains

distant and difficult to understand for the group and for the viewer. In

contrast, Hildy is much more approachable and closer to membership in the

(a perennial Hawksian consideration)

group proper/and the spectrum of cynicism/sentimentality she runs only endears

her to us.

exactly
again
professional
ideal

So it is that in our search for a spokesperson for Hecht within his own scripts we must reject Walter Burns as too adamantly cynical and Anthony Mallarme as initially too cynical and then too sentimental and settle uneasily upon the curious combination of cynicism and sentimentality that is Hildy Johnson. Just as cynicism (Burns) and sentimentality (Williams) both appeal to Hildy, Hecht can script films with either a sentimentalist (Cora) or a cynic (Burns) triumphing, as in THE SCOUNDREL and HIS GIRL FRIDAY, respectively. In the most successful of his work he fuses these two impulses in characters vivified by the tension generated from their interplay. In a work such as THE SCOUNDREL he tips the balance first one way and finally the other with extreme and deadening effect.

As you suggest, Hecht seems to need a
cheating hand on his divergent
impulses - Hawks neatly put his
grandiose sentiment to rest by bulldozing it
under the soundtrack

ENGLISH 103
American Films of the 1930's
Semester I, 1975-76
Professor M. Silverman

Assignment 5a

1. Both films have as their root political assumption that one stout man and true can change the nature of American life. How does each film propose that this individual enterprise can be effected, what forces does it set in motion, and what insoluble problems are raised? Why are the endings of each film so irresolute?
2. Discuss Capra's abilities as an editor, taking as your two examples for discussion a conversation-piece (e.g., Jefferson Smith and Saunders drafting the bill in his office) and a sequence filled with kinetic activity (e.g., the rival attempts to marshal home-town opinion about Smith). What effects does Capra achieve by varying the length of his shots so markedly, and how does he cut from face to face in order to achieve maximum emotional expressiveness?
3. Often in GABRIEL OVER THE WHITE HOUSE Gregory LaCava will oppose the image-track and the sound-track, so that we feel a tension and opposition in the sequence. Can you give examples of this, and discuss the effectiveness of the device?
4. American political mythology is constantly evoked in both films. What do the various figures seem to stand for, as myth--Lincoln, Jefferson, Wilson, Harding--and how do they get developed dramatically in the films?
5. Discuss each film--with specific reference to imagery and theme--as essentially religious in nature. What is the creed, who are the followers, and what qualities does it take to be a priest?

Assignment 5b

Gangster films

1. What critical advantage do we gain by attempting to see a group of films as representative of certain thematic, iconographic, sociological characteristics? Why do certain types of films (i.e., the western, the gangster film, the musical) lend themselves to this type of analysis? Is there any danger of overlooking the individuality of the films in approaching them this way?
2. European film-goers seem to love these films (especially the French). What attitudes, postures and values would seem to you virtually untranslatable, and uniquely American?
3. In his essay "The Gangster as Tragic Hero" (in The Immediate Experience, 1962) sees the gangster as "the man of the city, with the city's language and knowledge, with its queer and dishonest skills and its terrible daring . . . not the real city, but that dangerous and sad city of the imagination which is so much more important, which is the modern world." What are the essential modernist preoccupations (e.g., loneliness, unreflective energy, appropriation of the other, diverted sexuality) of this form? NB. No one has to claim Enrico Caesar Bandello as Camus' Rebel, or anything like that.)
4. Comment on some of the triangles in LITTLE CAESAR (Rico-Joe-Olga, Rico-Joe-Otero) and THE ROARING TWENTIES (Eddie-George-Lloyd, Eddie-Panama-Jean). In what ways do they structure the films, and implement (or project) the values of the central figure? (N.B. Do not give a straightforward "character analysis," with recapitulation of motives and plot.)
5. Analyze the doubling that takes place within the various films, in terms of character (Jean-Panama, Eddie-George in THE ROARING TWENTIES, Tom Powers and his brother in THE PUBLIC ENEMY, Rico-Joe in LITTLE CAESAR), morality (law-anarchy), success (being a somebody, being a nobody), enterprise (business-crime), iconography (flashy cars, good suits--trucks, ordinary suits, including uniforms).

1
Fascinating analysis -
seems to me ~~to be~~ your
thesis is entirely valid -
perhaps the progressively ~~decreased~~
presence of theatricality ~~is~~
reflects the natural genesis of any genre.

Jeremy Butler

English 163

Mr. Silverman

December 8, 1975

Assignment 5b, Theatricality in LITTLE CEASAR, PUBLIC ENEMY and ROARING TWENTIES

It would tax one's imagination to conjure a vision of Rico Bandello (LITTLE CEASAR), Tom Powers (PUBLIC ENEMY) or Eddie Bartlett (THE ROARING TWENTIES) seated passively at a play, movie or, most certainly, opera. Their character is too dynamic and, more importantly, too theatrical (too spectacular) for them to exist as part of an audience. Even though gangster films operate within a certain black-jack realism, they ultimately enact a very special type of theatricality. Furthermore this particular type of theatricality varies grossly even within the limited range of the three films under consideration. Before we enter that consideration it seems advisable to begin defining "theatricality" -- presumably a more extensive and less confused meaning will evolve through the course of the paper. For now I will assume theatricality to be that artifice which is created by adult minds and in which human existence is condensed into a text. Though this text may be couched in various languages (cinematic, linguistic, melodic, ceremonial, etc.) it will always bear the common mark of the ordering hand of man (or woman).

the film gangsters' stylized way of being certainly seems to lend itself to this definition

It has been pointed out in regards to the repression of sexuality in Cagney and Robinson's characters that Cagney internalizes things which are overt in Robinson. Applying this concept to the theatricality in the three films mentioned above it would seem apparent that Cagney and the films PUBLIC ENEMY and ^RROARING TWENTIES themselves internalize the theatricality overt in Robinson and, correspondingly, LITTLE CEASAR. For a film to internalize ^{theatricality}

is what I understand to be meant by the term "transparent style." For us to be able to watch a film without acknowledging the presence of the medium (i.e., transparent style) necessarily means that the theatricality has been internalized. We must, however, recognize that just as there are no totally transparent films, there are no films in which theatricality has been completely internalized. Ironically, these "opaque" moments in a film are in effect the "holes" in the text through which we may view the theatricality which has been subsumed (repressed?) in the sub-text (to quote M. Silverman: "underneath the gangster is the dancer").

a fascinating thought - would seem to give with the progressive "socialization" of them + motifs from LC to RT

According to the paradigm of theatricality I have created above, LITTLE CEASAR is the movie most consciously involved with theatricality. Of Rico, Tom Powers and Eddie Bartlett, Rico evinces the largest concern for his personal theatricality. (After all, what is style but the theater we present and to those spectating us.) Not only does he crave flashy clothes /cars, but he is infatuated with the creation of the proper style. Instead of avoiding the press as Diamond Pete Montana cautiously does, Rico welcomes them to his testimonial and invites their photographs (later purchasing enough copies of the edition in which it is printed to astound the newsboy). *self-reflexivity as the ultimate in theatre?* Evidence of Rico's vain search for the proper personal style abounds throughout the course of the entire film. Director Mervyn LeRoy even felt constrained to emphasize Rico's vanity with a title midway through the film: "Rico continues to take care of himself, his hair and his gun." In the end policeman "Bull" Flaherty's insistent repudiation of Rico's theatricality in the newspapers draws Rico into the open and leads directly to his death. Even his last words echo his concern with his personal style/theatricality. We may interpret Rico's query as not just a pathetic mode of questioning his imminent death, but as a demand to know if this is the end of the myth termed Rico. To ask if this

could be the end of Rico is to imply that a machine gun death hiding behind a billboard isn't grandly stylish enough to honor the myth. There is no Panama around to say he was a "big shot", as there is in ROARING TWENTIES.

While Ceasar courts certification of his style from the outside world, Cagney's characters in PUBLIC ENEMY and ROARING TWENTIES carry their style with effortless ease; his theatricality has been internalized. Though he shares Rico's rise through the ranks of organized crime and his consequent quest for power and acquisitions, he doesn't feel the compulsion to actively enhance his appearance or to solicit certification of his style. Occasionally this theatricality surfaces (e.g., the dance step he does as he enters his convertible just after giving Harlow that first ride), but generally it remains invisible (transparent). If one were to be suddenly removed from the spell of the drama, it would be readily apparent that Tom Powers and Eddie Bartlett are pure artifice conceived through the joint effort of James Cagney, Wellman/Walsh, etc. As we view the film, however, we concentrate on actions and emotions and take style for granted.

The films themselves mirror the stylistic concerns of their protagonist. LITTLE CEASAR repeatedly brings theatricality to our attention with ceremonies such as Tony's funeral and the testimonial dinner. These ceremonies codify human existence into ritualized, preconceived exercises. The interjection of these "mini" texts into the course of rough and tumble, rise and fall action illustrated Rico's concern for well-produced theatricality. Ceremonies such as those mentioned above do not enter centrally into either PUBLIC ENEMY or ROARING TWENTIES. In fact opportunities for ceremonies are ignored (e.g., funerals, Matt and Mamie's and Jean and Lloyd's marriages) and the narrative presses on, gradually accelerated by the exigencies of bootlegging and gangsterism.

perhaps the billboard becomes so conspicuous precisely because it must subsume + transform (i.e., "seminize") his grandiose myth

yes - I wonder if this is part of the lifestyle of any genre - to populate the world with its style, then return into trans- parency constantly recreate his myth

Though both of the Cagney films reject overt forms of theatricality such as funerals and testimonials their protagonists occasionally create theatricality in their own situations. Consider for example the presentation of the beer keg at Mike Powers' homecoming or the shoot-out in Nick Brown's restaurant ("Eats"). In both of these instances it is Cagney who inculcates a sequence with theatricality. Whether by seating the keg in the center of the table (centerstage) and passing the beer out very deliberately or by striding into what was previously a quiet restaurant but quickly becomes a drama of bullets and epithets with the spectators shivering in fear Cagney transforms a commonplace ^{setting} ~~situation~~ into one of high tension and drama. Cagney's internalized theatricality reinforces these aspects of the theater in the actions above but it does not promote theatricality in the more overt and static forms of ceremonies. *Good point*

One link between LITTLE CEASAR and THE ROARING TWENTIES that does not fully apply to PUBLIC ENEMY is the constant presence of the speakeasy or nightclub and the subsequent singing and dancing therein. Though Tom and Matt (in PUBLIC ENEMY) frequent a delinquent's social club and a decade later nightclubs, neither one of them falls in love with a dancer/singer as do both Rico and Eddie. The dancers in LITTLE CEASAR and ROARING TWENTIES (Joe Masara and Jean Sherman) operate as agents of theatricality, epitomes of style. Their interaction with the protagonists helps illuminate the qualities of theatricality within Rico and Eddie. Rico, the character least certain of his own style, attempts to discourage Joe's interest in dancing (i.e., theatricality); he thinks it "soft" and worthless, but he finds he cannot dominate it. ² Just as he can't fully control his own theatricality successfully. *excellent point* In contrast, Eddie actually works to further the theatrical career of his dancer/singer. He fits comfortably within the milieu of the nightclub,

interacting easily with both Panama and Jean (billed as "Jean Sherman and her Baby Bandits"). *now - I'd forgotten this!* Assured as he is of his internal style/theatricality, he can afford to place it at the disposal of other persons. At the conclusion of ROARING TWENTIES one dancer/singer will unknowingly lead him to his demise, but the other will support him until the very end. *interesting point - Panama seems to confirm the idea that a gangster's life is "stylish" - perhaps the poignancy of her singing points to it*

In conclusion, it is Rico's overriding interest in style that emerges most saliently from LITTLE CEASAR. The film itself mirrors this concern through its ample supply of ceremonies, Rico's inability to conquer Joe's style (certainly the final shot of the billboard validates *I agree* this) and the mise en scene outfitted with attire selected from Robert Weine's cabinet (e.g., some of the interiors *and* Rico's walk through the wind immediately after he calls "Park 1000", the police). (A study of the theatricality of the visuals has been sadly neglected here; it itself could comprise an entire paper.) As we have seen, Tom Powers and Eddie Bartlett's styles are practically transparent; their concern for style and their respective films' concerns for style are generally internal. *it's a very stylishly desperate reality "as stylized despair"*

Wahler seems to isolate aspects of the gangster's persona into discrete characters - I wonder if this ~~is~~ ~~doesn't~~ ~~doesn't~~ support your sense that style incarnates itself into "bits", sets, trends almost invisibly